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THE QUESTION OF THRACE AT THE PEACE CONFERENCE

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Thrace, consisting of the Provinces of Adrianople and Constantinople, has been on the table before the Peace Conference for more than two months, and has caused more discussion in the political circles than any other territorial problem, with the exception of Fiume.

Modern Thrace comprises the region extending along the Aegean Sea and the Sea of Marmora, from the eastern boundary of Macedonia, which is generally coterminus with the Mesta River, to Constantinople on the Bosphorus. Thrace touches on the east the Black Sea and extends northward to the Bulgarian Plateau. The river Maritza which leaves Bulgaria in the neighborhood of Adrianople and flows southward to the sea near Enos and Dedeagatch, divides Thrace into two parts, Eastern Thrace, otherwise known as Turkish Thrace, and Western or Bulgarian Thrace. The northern boundary of Eastern Thrace which is the present boundary with Bulgaria, passes to the north of Adrianople and Kirk-Kilisse from the Maritza River to the Black Sea. The northern boundary of Western Thrace follows generally the course of the Arda River, from the neighborhood of Pasmakli to its junction with the Maritza in the neighborhood of Adrianople. Western Thrace is sometimes called Bulgarian Thrace merely because Bulgaria obtained possession of it at the close of the late Balkan Wars. The port of Dedeagatch lies west of the mouth of the Maritza River in Western Thrace. From this point the railroad follows the valley of the Maritza to Adrianople, Philippopolis and Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria.

The treaty which was handed to the Bulgarian delegates at Paris upon September 19, and which has been signed by Bulgaria, provides for the cession of Western Thrace to the allied and associated powers. The new boundary is stipulated to begin at a point eight miles southwest of Bashmakli identical with Pasmakli, indicated above, and follows a line drawn through Kilkik, Kartal-Dagh and the Tokatjik-Dagh. The allied and associated powers thus come into possession of Western Thrace, which is part of the former Turkish Province of Adrianople.

The question on which all hinges is the disposition to be made of Thrace. To define sharply the issue, we shall quote the pertinent paragraph in the resolution introduced by Senator King on August 13, and referred to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee:

Resolved, That it is the sense of the Senate that in the treaties of peace with Bulgaria and with Turkey western or Bulgarian Thrace, including Adrianople, to the line from Enos, on the Aegean Sea, to Midia, on the Black Sea, should be awarded to Greece, proper facilities for Bulgarian commerce to be reserved at Saloniki, Kavalla and Dedeagatch.

The solution there proposed is in substantial agreement with the request of Greece as presented by Mr. Venizelos. In the Peace Conference it is endorsed by the delegates of Great Britain, of France, of Italy, and of Japan. It has the support, we are told, of the first experts attached to our delegation in Paris. But the latest report is that our new experts have reached other conclusions, so that our delegates to the Conference are now urging, in opposition to all of our Allies, a very different settlement of the question; and one, too, which is open to the gravest objections.

The first question involved is a question of fact—the character of the population of Thrace. While we are not, of course, basing our request upon historical considerations, we nevertheless believe that an understanding of the way in which the present distribution of this population was brought about will help to carry conviction.

A little more than 1000 years B.C. the inhabitants of the Balkans could have been classified on the basis of language into three well-defined groups. The trunk of the peninsula was divided between the Illyrians on the west and the Thracians on the east, while its southern extension was in the hands of the Greeks. All three were members of the Aryan family of languages and all were, relatively speaking, new comers in this part of the world. Two of these languages have passed away without leaving any but the most insignificant traces; for of Illyrian and Thracian, practically nothing is left save a few names of persons and localities. The future was in the possession of the third group—of the Greeks. They were distinguished, among many other things, by a genius for colonization—for an ability to go out among other peoples and not only govern but assimilate them—that is, make Greeks of them in language, ideals, and feelings. They flowed across the islands of the Aegæan, first to the shores of Asia Minor.

Then the tide turned toward the northern coast of the Aegean through the Dardanelles, the sea of Marmora into the Black Sea, reaching as far as Trebizond and the Crimea. The movement began in the eighth century B.C., lasted through the seventh, and on into the sixth century. The result, as far as it concerns us, is a fringe of Greek cities running around the coast from Saloniki to Constantinople and beyond. These cities were then the outposts of civilization, but by the middle of the fifth century they were equal to any part of Greece in art, science, or general cultivation. How rapidly their influence worked upon the natives of the hinterland is unknown in detail; but prominent Athenian families like those of Miltiades and Thucydides were soon intermarrying with the Thracians and proud of the connection. There is some reason for believing that the frontier of Greek influence reached at this time a line drawn west from Midia. A century later Philip of Macedon founded Philippopolis and other cities in the interior of the country and fought his way to the Black Sea at Varna, spreading Greek civilization as he went. A few years later Alexander completed his father's work by

carrying the frontier to the Danube. It is very significant that his fighting seems to have begun when he reached the Balkan range—the old boundary between Bulgaria proper and eastern Rumelia. Apparently that was then the limit of Grecian influence.

Under the Romans, the land remained Greek in language and civilization. Thrace being the last Province (46) in this part of the world to be incorporated in their empire. The Latin language never gained south of the Danube a foothold comparable with that which it won beyond that river. That points to the presence in all Thrace of a more highly civilized people, of a Greek-speaking population.

Coming to the retrogression of Hellenism in this territory, we need not trouble ourselves with the raids of the Celts, of the Goths, of the Huns, and of the Avars. These marauding peoples came and went without permanent results. But there was another great migration which we must mention—the coming of the Slav. Its effect is seen even today in the presence of the Slovenes, the Serbo-Croates, and the Bulgarians in the Balkan Peninsula. The movement began from the north bank of the Danube early in the sixth century of our era and lasted to the middle of the seventh century. It affected most of the Balkan Peninsula profoundly, but the remarkable thing is the extent to which Thrace (in the modern sense of the word) escaped. The situation may be seen at a glance on the ethnological map published by L. Nierdele (*Slavonske Starozitnosti*, 11, 2, 1910, p. 296), showing the status in the seventh and eighth centuries.

This map shows the extent of the invasion of the Bulgarians, who, like the Huns and the Turks, were a Tartar people from Asia. The modern Bulgarian is a cross between them and the Slav—a hybrid people with Tartar name, Slavic language, and mixed blood. Into the combination the Bulgar put what the Slav had lacked—initiative and organization. They established a kingdom in the region between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains—the territory that is Bulgarian in the strictest sense of the word and was known as such from 1878 to 1885. It was a State

with a checkered career into which we shall not go. It dreamed fitfully of vast dominion. The dreams took shape at times and led the Bulgars to the walls of Constantinople and Saloniki. But these cities were never destined to be theirs. The dreams vanished—the Bulgar could never establish himself upon the shores of the Aegean. His subjection in 1393 to the Turk put an end to such efforts. Bulgars then disappear from history until the year 1877.

We have told this story at some length to lead up to the question: Must we expect to find in Thrace a Bulgarian population or a population that is part Turkish, part Greek? On the answer to that question the whole issue depends. For, as Americans, we believe that most fundamental of all rights is the right of a people not merely to good government but to self-government. That is something entitled to precedence over considerations of policy and over economic desires.

Who, then, make up the population of Thrace? The most reliable statistics available are those of the Turkish government for 1912, which have been used both by Venizelos (*Greece Before the Peace Conference of 1919*, appendix 2) and Professor Sotoriades (an ethnological map illustrating Hellenism in the Balkan Peninsula and Asia Minor, London, 1918). These figures come from an ally of Bulgaria, and yet they show that in the whole of Thrace there are 957,000 Turks, 730,000 Greeks, 112,000 Bulgarians, 183,000 Armenians, 65,000 Jews, and 151,000 inhabitants of other nationalities.

The Turks are thus the most numerous element in the population. But there is one thing on which all parties are agreed. Four and one-half centuries of misrule, tyranny, and oppression on the part of the Turks have rendered it impossible to plan for any continuance of Turkish government in Europe. The Turks must either leave Thrace or accept the government of some other people. Their destiny is clear. Of the remaining element the Greeks have a large plurality, and in particular they outnumber the Bulgarians—the only others to be considered seriously—in the proportion of 7 to 1.

Now, it is possible to bring an objection to the form of this presentation of the case. We wish to consider it in order to show that the vital issue remains unaffected. It may be said that Mr. Venizelos is asking only for a part of Thrace and that our statistics should refer only to that part. We recognize the force of such an objection and will attempt to present such statistics. They cannot be given with absolute exactness, because the figures are based on the old administrative district and the new lines cut across them. The inexactness, however, shall not be permitted to work to the advantage of the Greeks. We subtract, therefore, the vilayet of Constantinople and the sandjaks of Rodosto and Gallipoli, which lie in the main beyond the Enos-Midia line, with a population of 489,000 Greeks and 9000 Bulgars. We subtract also four northern sandjaks—Achi-Tchelembi, Kirdjali, Mustapha-Pasha, Tyrnovo—not claimed by Mr. Venizelos, because they contain only 9000 Greeks to 35,000 Bulgarians.

The result is 232,000 Greeks as against 68,000 Bulgarians, or a proportion of over 3 to 1—certainly a sufficient preponderance on which to base a valid claim. It is to be noted also that the other nationalities (except the Turks, 348,000) have practically disappeared, there being but 5000 Armenians and 13,000 Jews. In the territory claimed the Greeks are thus much more than double the Bulgars, Armenians, and Jews taken together.

The Greeks who offer to nationalize everything east of the Saros-Midia line and make concessions so liberal, surely they are entitled to favorable consideration when they present other claims.

To attempt a similar calculation for the various divisions said to be proposed by Mr. Polk for the partition of Thrace is impossible. The details of his plan are reported too indefinitely and his lines seem to conflict more seriously with the administrative districts. We can form a better judgment by consulting an ethnological map.

In this connection we wish to call attention to the character of the authors of the maps which support the Greek view. We have already cited the map of Soteriades. He

is a professor of history at the University of Athens. His map is based upon these figures and so adds nothing more to the Greek claim. But there is the map published by Herman Hirt (*Die Indo-Germanen*, Strassburg, 1905–1907, map 2). It is on a small scale, but clearly corroborates the Greek position. Professor Hirt is the leading authority of the world upon the question of the original home of the Aryans and their dispersion through Europe and Asia. No scholar's opinion is entitled to greater weight. His work has been largely with the Slavic languages—that fact, his German nationality, the date of his book, all combine to free him from any suspicion of prejudice in the case. Then there is the map facing page 20 in the *Balkans*, Oxford, 1915, written by four English scholars, Nevill Forbes, Arnold T. Toynbee, D. Mitrany, D. G. Hogarth, at a time when it was hoped that Bulgaria could be won to the side of our allies. Of these, Toynbee and Hogarth are eminent names in the field of classical scholarship. Another excellent map is to be found in the *Rise of Nationality in the Balkans*, by R. W. Seton-Watson, lecturer in East European history, King's College, University London, London, 1917.

Then we have a book with quite a remarkable map by Amadore-Vergili, entitled *La Questione Rumeliota e la Politica Italiana*. The map is ethnological, but it shows the distribution of Greek and Bulgarian schools and churches. It not only proves the population but it also shows that the Greeks are better educated, more interested in education, as well as more numerous than the Bulgars.

We know that there are maps that show a different result—a Bulgarian population where a Bulgarian corridor was wanted. Soteriades mentions one such “issued under the auspices of the *Daily Telegraph* by the *Geographia* (Ltd.).” Another was published by Leon Dominian; a third appeared in the *National Geographic Magazine* for December, 1918. Of the last two, one was by a graduate, the other by a former professor of Roberts College. These three maps were based on the statistics offered by Bouchier, the friend of Bulgaria, and are necessarily biased. The Bulgarians seem, indeed, to be inclined to shift their position.

Our statistics, they say, are right for 1912, and our maps also. But the Bulgars have held the country since 1913—their troops have been there during the war—and the ethnology of the country, they tell us, has changed. We should, they urge, recognize the changed condition. In plain language, that means we should reward murder and frightfulness. Such an argument needs no answer.

To sum up, our view of the situation is based upon the principle of a people's right to self-determination.

In the part of Thrace asked for by Mr. Venizelos there are more than three Greeks to every Bulgar. They represent a population which has held to this land for over 2500 years in spite of indescribable cruelty and oppression. They desire ardently to govern themselves by uniting again with the land from which their fathers came. It seems to us, as Americans, a plain duty to place no obstacle in the way of this desire.

So far we have endeavored to establish the fact that the numerical, cultural, and economic superiority of the Greeks in Thrace is in the proportion of 7 to 1 in favor of the Greek element. This fact alone should be sufficient to induce our country to decide in favor of Greece in the question of Thrace. Unfortunately, it is understood from the reports which come to us from Paris that our American delegation, while admitting the numerical superiority of the Greek element in Thrace, is not prepared to allow Thrace to be united with the mother country Greece. What imperative reasons are forcing themselves upon our delegates at Paris to disregard the principle of nationality in favor of the ally of our enemies and at the expense of one of our faithful Allies?

According to the latest plan submitted by our American delegation at Paris in connection with the solution of the question of Thrace, the entire Province of Thrace is divided into three parts: that lying to the north of the River Arda is given to Bulgaria; the district of Xanthi, something like 30 square miles, is given to Greece, and the remainder is left for further consideration. The American delegation insists that this third part become international, together

with Constantinople. What are the reasons adduced by the American delegates in Paris in justification of this plan? In the first place it is contended that Bulgaria needs an economic outlet on the Aegean. Secondly, it is argued that unless Bulgaria has a guaranty of a free access to the Aegean Sea, she will not cease from plotting and preparing for a Balkan war. Thirdly, it is argued that the American delegation is forced to oppose Greek claims to Thrace, in order to discourage the desire of the Great Powers for splitting Bulgaria between Roumania and Serbia. We shall take up these arguments one by one.

Bulgaria has no economic need of an outlet to the Aegean. Bulgaria, a nation of 4,500,000, has two excellent ports on the Black Sea—Varna and Bourgas. Roumania, a nation of 15,000,000 has only one port on the same sea—Constanza. With the internationalization of Constantinople and the Dardanelles, Bulgaria can not be said to be barred from an access to the Aegean. The only port included in the international strip of Thrace is the port of Dede-Agatch. This port is absolutely unavailable for commercial purposes. The Dede-Agatch is only an open roadstead, which will take millions of dollars to render available for commercial purposes. Bulgaria has held that port since 1913, and she not only has not seriously attempted to use this port for commercial purposes, but she has not even passed any legislation providing for the future improvement of this port for commercial purposes. She has, however, provided the Dede-Agatch with a very small railroad line, which was meant to feed the submarines. Nor is it possible to believe that with the internationalization of this port Bulgaria will avail itself of it. No Bulgarian government would be willing to make financial appropriations for the improvement of this port, which will not be in the possession of Bulgaria. The eastern portion of Bulgaria in which the two great ports, Varnas and Bourgas, lie, is the commercial and industrial part of Bulgaria, and it so happens that it wields a preponderant influence in the politics of the country. It is impossible to believe that this preponderant influence will permit an appropriation in favor of improving the port

of Dede-Agatch, which is not Bulgarian and which will mean the death of the ports of Varna and Bourgas and the transference of the commercial and industrial center of Bulgaria from that portion of the country to internationalized Thrace. It becomes evident, then, that by internationalizing a portion of western Thrace, Bulgaria's economic necessity, if there be any, cannot be satisfied.

We have come to the second argument, namely, the fear that unless we give a guaranty to Bulgaria of a free access to the Aegean Sea, she will agitate for war in the Balkans. This argument may be considered from two points of view. It is either an American concession to a threat on the part of Bulgaria, or a fear on the part of the American delegates and an attempt to placate Bulgaria. If it is an admission of threat on the part of Bulgaria, the American delegation, by yielding to this threat, is clearly admitting that there is no moral force behind the league of the Allies to enforce justice. If it is merely a fear and an attempt to placate the Bulgarians, the American delegation shows that it ignores the lessons of the events which have transpired since 1913, and also, it seems to ignore the dreams and ambitions of Bulgaria. In 1912 Mr. Venizelos in the hopes of establishing the Balkan league, and in full realization of the fact that Bulgaria would not consent to become a member of the league without serious concessions on the part of Greece, offered Bulgaria not only the whole of western Thrace and a very large portion of eastern Thrace, but also the largest portion of eastern Macedonia at a small distance from Salonica. Was Bulgaria satisfied? In the summer of 1913 she treacherously attacked both Greece and Serbia, in the hopes of seizing Salonica and Monastir, and in the hopes of reaching the Adriatic Sea. The Bulgarian armies were completely crushed. At the treaty of Bucharest Mr. Venizelos was disillusioned as to the possibility of pacifying Bulgaria with any concessions lesser than the entire Balkan Peninsula. This time he refused to repeat the error of 1912, and insisted upon occupying Thrace, but Russia and Austria-Hungary, each vying with the other for the friendship of Bulgaria as a military power in the

Balkans, imposed upon Mr. Venizelos the necessity of yielding Thrace to Bulgaria. Was Bulgaria placated? Immediately upon the occupation of Thrace, the Bulgarian authorities initiated the most cruel persecutions against the Greek element, and in 1914, Bulgaria concluded a treaty of alliance with Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey.

In 1915, France and England insisted that Mr. Venizelos should make concessions to Bulgaria in eastern Macedonia in order that she might be detached from the Central Powers. Mr. Venizelos, while completely convinced that Bulgaria was already determined to throw her weight on the side of the Central Powers in the expectation of annihilating Serbia, of crushing Roumania, and of driving Greece to the old boundaries of 1912, yielded to the demands of the Allied Powers and offered Bulgaria the port of Kavala.

These three instances in the course of six years show beyond doubt the ambitions of Bulgaria in the Balkans; that infinitely greater concessions have been made to Bulgaria by Mr. Venizelos and have proved futile, and that the thought of the American delegates that Bulgaria would be satisfied and placated with the internationalization of a strip of Thracian territory is undeniably erroneous.

In closing the reply to the second contention of our delegates, we should not fail to understand that an international strip of territory, far from succeeding in placating Bulgaria, will only expose eastern Thrace to constant dangers from that country and will encourage it to watch for an opportune moment to invade this international strip. The unfortunate events that took place between 1900 and 1906 in Macedonia under the very eyes of the European commission of control will inevitably be repeated in this international strip of Thrace.

The Bulgarians will subsidize immigration into Thrace, and the Greeks, in order to counteract this movement for the alteration of its national character, will do the same in their turn. Friction will be inevitable; revolutionary and guerilla warfare will take place in the international territory, in which the Greek element will side with the Greek revolutionists and the imported Bulgarians with the

Bulgarian contagis. War will thus be inevitable. The plan of internationalizing Thrace far from creating conditions which will foster permanent peace, creates causes for inevitable wars. Bulgaria will not be satisfied, no matter what concessions the peace conference is disposed to make. The only plan which can be a guaranty of perfect peace in the Balkans is the plan originally suggested by Mr. Venizelos and subscribed to at first by the American delegation at Paris. That plan is that Greece should occupy those portions of Thrace west of the Saros-Midia line to such points in the north as are preponderantly Greek, leaving the district of Moustapha-Pasha and of Tyrnovo to Bulgaria, because here the Bulgarian element is numerically superior to the Greek. This plan is a guaranty for peace in the Balkans because it is based on absolute justice. The Greek nation will be completely satisfied and the better elements of the Bulgarian nation, which are not poisoned with imperialistic ideas, will also be satisfied with this solution.

In case Bulgaria should think of disturbing the peace of the Balkans, a strong Greece, with a united Thracian front, allied to Serbia and to Roumania, will be a convincing argument to the practical Bulgarians that it will not pay them to launch again upon the adventures of 1913 and 1915.

Finally, we come to the last argument, that the American delegation is forced to oppose the claims of Greece in order to discourage the desires of the allied powers of Europe for the complete extinction of Bulgaria. We believe that American diplomacy can protect Bulgarian integrity by other means more just and honorable. It is not necessary to do injustice to Greece in order to defend Bulgaria from foreign aggression. But if it is necessary that Greece should give the first example of self-sacrifice and self-denial to the other allied Balkan States, we may indicate that Mr. Venizelos has already gone to the limit of such sacrifice. The Greek people have dreamed for centuries for the establishment of Hellenism in Constantinople. That portion of Thrace which is to be internationalized and is to include Constantinople as its capital is Greek in history, in population,

in commerce, and in culture, and yet the Greek people resign themselves to the abandonment of their claims upon the most cherished portion of the Thracian province in order to satisfy the rivalries of the great powers and to contribute as much as is within their power to the establishment of a permanent peace. But Greece has not only made concessions in Thrace, but also has offered willingly half a million of Greeks on the Black Sea to make possible the creation of an Armenian State. In view of such sacrifices we hardly believe justifiable the insistence of our delegates to force upon Greece the necessity of a greater sacrifice, which may exasperate the Grecian people and alienate their friendship for America and for the allied powers.

In concluding, we wish to repeat that Bulgaria has no need of economic access to the Aegean; that the internationalization of Thrace is not only contrary to the principle of nationality, but will also create causes for future wars in the Balkans; it fails to placate Bulgaria and is certain to alienate the friendship of Greece; it encourages Bulgaria to hope for a possibility of invading Thrace. In other words, it strengthens the enemy of yesterday, and the certain enemy of tomorrow by weakening our ally of yesterday, who of necessity must be our ally of tomorrow. Justice and sane policy dictate that Greece should have those portions of Thrace which are claimed by Mr. Venizelos. With Venizelos at the head of a strong Greece, we may be certain that Bulgaria can be persuaded to throw off her imperialistic dreams and to recognize the community of interests between the Bulgarian and the Greek nations, the one being an agricultural country, the other a commercial and industrial one.